

TODDLERS NEED A LITTLE MORE: FACILITATIVE PLAY SKILLS TO USE WITH TWOS

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Developmental Challenges

- Sensorimotor stage
 - ▣ What does this do?
 - ▣ What can I do with it?
- Limited background knowledge
- Difficulty sustaining attention and regulating self
- Limited language



Important Milestones (18-24 months)

- Can distinguish make believe from real experiences
- Use deferred imitation skillfully
 - Retain modeled behaviors for several months
 - Copy peers and adults
 - Imitate across changes in context
 - Recall behaviors in order
- Understand that different people have different desires/goals

Important Milestones (18-24 months)

- Understand actions to be appropriate for some but not other objects
- Understanding of self as an independent agent
- Explosion in language
 - Understand words can refer to something not present (displaced reference)
- Can apply something learned from a book with realistic looking pictures to real objects

Sociability in Play

Type	Characteristics
Nonsocial Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unoccupied, onlooker behavior • Solitary play
Parallel Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plays near other children with similar toys, but does not try to influence them
Social Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associative play Children engage in separate activities but share toys or comment on one another's behaviors. • Cooperative play Children cooperate, reciprocate and share common goals (i.e., acting out a make-believe theme).

Cognitive Play Categories

Type	Characteristics	Learning
Functional Play (0-2 years)	Physically exploring objects, simple, repetitive motor movements, with/without objects	Coordination, motor skills, visual perception, spatial orientation, cause & effect, properties of objects
Pretend Play (2-6 years)	Acting out everyday and imaginative roles	Abstract thinking, emotional awareness, perspective-taking & empathy, social norms and values, sustained attention, self-reflection
Constructive Play (3-6 years)	Building, creating or constructing something from a plan	Initiative, mastery, creativity, divergent thinking, sequencing, math & science concepts, problem solving

Development of Pretend Play

Age	Characteristics	Examples
12-18 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Functional play ▪ Performs typical actions with conventional objects—self oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dumps or throws toys ▪ Drinks from cup or eats from spoon
18 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Applies action patterns previously performed on self to others ▪ Imitates actions of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Makes teddy bear pretend to sleep ▪ Pretends to cook
24 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pretends one object is another ▪ Pretends self is something else 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pretends to brush doll's hair with a block ▪ Crawls and barks—pretending to be a dog
36 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reproduces elaborate scenes from reality ▪ Alters real episodes ▪ Corrects reality with fantasy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pretends someone falls, injures self, and goes to the hospital

Vygotsky

- Children learn through interactions with more skillful partners
 - Zone of proximal development
 - Intersubjectivity
 - Scaffolding
 - Guided participation



Skilled Facilitation

- Makes the play process easier and more effective
- Maximizes the benefits of play
- Minimizes conflict and confusion
- Extends and enriches play
- Promotes exploration

- Is not intrusive or controlling
- Does not limit or restrict play



The Basics

- Make time and space for play in the daily routine.
- Have play materials (realistic props and those without clear functions) readily accessible.
- Set appropriate limits to maintain physical and emotional safety.
- Provide preparatory experiences to enhance background knowledge.
- Keep the setting clean and organized.

Parallel Play

- Get down on the child's level.
- Observe, wait, and listen.
- Follow the child's lead.
- Imitate.
- Play next to the child with limited interaction.
- Model appropriate play behaviors.
- Model inner speech.

Co-play

- Join existing play as a follower.
- Reflect expressed and implied feelings.
 - ▣ Oh, the baby got hurt. She's sad.
- Make descriptive comments about play behaviors.
 - ▣ You stacked five blocks.
- Respond contingently to actions and comments of players.
 - ▣ Thank you for this delicious tea!

Enrich the Play

- Avoid teaching skills directly.
- Ask limited, exploratory questions focused on the play process.
 - What does your baby like to eat?
- Extend/contextualize play behaviors and knowledge.
 - You're washing that baby. She must have been dirty. She probably feels better now that she's had a bath.
- Model and scaffold new skills.
- Extend the child's communications.

Outside Interventions (Directive)

- Teach skills directly.
 - She asked if you wanted some tea. She's waiting for you to answer her. You can say, "Yes please" or "No thanks."
- Comment on effective play behaviors.
 - Oh, you put the food on a plate and served it to her. That's just what a waitperson in a restaurant would do.
- Ask questions and make suggestions to shift the direction of the play.
 - Maybe you could be the daddy coming home from work.
- Foster contact between players.
 - Your dog is hungry? You could ask Tyler to give it some food.

Inside Interventions (Directive)

- Assume a role in the play.
 - I'll be the zookeeper and you be the lion.
- Add structure to the play.
 - Let's build a house over here.
- Introduce new play behaviors.
 - I'll call you to see if you want to come over to my house.
- Help children engage in "role speech."
 - You say, "What would you like to order?"
- Add more complex elements.
 - Oh, I'm sorry. We don't have any ice cream. Would you like pie instead?

Cognitive Benefits

- Helps children construct knowledge.
- Encourages children to try more challenging skills.
- Facilitates sustained attention, memory and logical reasoning skills.
- Encourages cognitive flexibility.
- Helps children develop imagination and creativity.
- Helps children separate ideas from objects and practice symbolic thought.

Communication Benefits

- Encourages and facilitates communication between partners.
- Offers opportunities to build vocabulary and expand understanding of language concepts.
- Encourages joint attention and turn-taking.
- Offers enjoyable opportunities for routines and repetition.
- Offers children opportunities to practice pragmatics naturally.

Social & Emotional Benefits

- Helps children develop a sense of self.
- Facilitates emotion integration and regulation.
- Strengthens a child's capacity to think before acting.
- Helps children understand social norms and expectations.



Selected References

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